

Imaginative Contemplation – The Kingdom of God



Image attributed to Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit. Amen

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and minds to help us discern whether the Kingdom of God is flourishing in our own lives and where the seeds are taking root.

Reading Mark:4:26-34

Jesus said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade. Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it.

He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

Contemplation

After celebrating Easter and the three great Feasts that followed it, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi, the Church returns to the Scripture Readings of Ordinary time, continuing with the Gospel of St Mark. In today's Gospel reading, St Mark talks about faith and the Kingdom of God. So let us enter the scene as we listen to Jesus

speaking to the crowds in parables, taking the images from the world around him; images that his listeners would be familiar with.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the apostles? One of the crowd? Perhaps you are the seed? Or something that is not mentioned in the scene?
- Are there many people there? Notice what is going on around you. Notice the variety of people present and notice their mood.
- When Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like a man throwing seed on the land, do you feel you are on familiar territory? Can you imagine this scenario?
- Have you ever thought of the Kingdom of God being like a seed? That the seed that can grow anywhere in the field and in unexpected places; just like the kingdom of God can find its way into the hearts of individuals and communities in unexpected ways?
- Have you ever thought that this insignificant seed grows to maturity in stages and that the farmer must be patient; just like the Kingdom of God matures in a person in stages in those who are patient and place their trust in God?
- Have you ever thought that when the crop is harvested, it nourishes the community; just like the kingdom of God, once it has grown in a person, it is a source of spiritual nourishment for others?
- Do you realise that for the seed to grow and come to harvest, the conditions must be right; just like the Kingdom of God coming to maturity in us must have the right conditions – conditions of faith, humility, and patience?
- When Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, did you ever think that from such tiny beginnings, it can become a home for many; just like the Kingdom of God is a place for all, bringing love, peace and hope to all?
- Do you realise that the seed of the Kingdom of God sown in you, although it may have small beginnings, it may make a large contribution to the community? Do you realise that the fruits you bear from these seeds will nourish others? That your large branches will be a welcome sign for others? That by allowing this seed to grow within you then others will see that you are a true witness to the Good News of Christ?

- Do you feel part of the Kingdom of God? How can you allow God to work in you so that you can flourish like the seeds and help nourish others?

Feel what is going on inside you as you listen to these words of Jesus. Ask him to help you find ways that you can grow to become part of the Kingdom of God.

Let us now spend ten minutes in quiet contemplation

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.